

# Getting Ready for College & Careers



A HANDBOOK FOR GRADES 6 THROUGH 8

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# Getting Started



**So now you're in middle school.** You're growing, learning, and having fun. High school graduation seems a long way off. But it's really just around the corner. The choices you make in middle school will help you succeed in high school...and in college. It's time to start thinking about your future. You can do anything or be anything you want if you start planning now.

Middle school is the time to decide what you like to do and who you want to be. Until now, you haven't been able to choose many of your classes. In high school, things are different. You'll have more freedom, more choices...and more challenges. The decisions you make will have a big impact on your college and career options.

The *Getting Ready for College & Careers* handbook gives you easy steps and activities to help you decide what course options and programs are right for you in high school and how you can prepare for college and beyond. This handbook is not going to tell you what to do with your life, but it will help you figure out what to do next.

# Learning for Life

**One of the best things** you can do is complete your high school education and, after that, continue on to college. Education prepares you for the changing world of work. But more than that, it prepares you to get the most out of your life. Education helps you expand your horizons and try new things. And a college education comes with even more benefits.

## College graduates:

- live longer, healthier lives.
- are more likely to stay employed.
- are more likely to enjoy their work.
- can change careers more easily.
- earn \$20,000 a year more, on average, than high school graduates.

So whatever your life interests and goals, think about earning a college degree. It might be the most important step you take on the road to life success.



## Median Earnings for Workers Age 25 and Up

Didn't finish high school	GED or high school diploma	Some college, no degree	Associate degree	Bachelor's degree	Master's degree	Doctorate degree	Professional degree
\$23,176	\$31,075	\$36,381	\$38,597	\$50,394	\$60,154	\$77,445	\$97,443

(Earnings of year-round full-time workers age 25 and over)

Source: Bureau of the Census ([www.pubdb3.census.gov/macro/032005perinc/new03\\_010.htm](http://www.pubdb3.census.gov/macro/032005perinc/new03_010.htm))

# STEP 1: Discover Yourself

## Who are you, and what do you want?

No one expects you to know yet. Instead of trying to decide exactly what you want to be when you graduate from college, start thinking about your likes, dislikes, and interests and how they might influence your career choices.

Even if you already know what you want to do during and after high school, it's still a good idea to go through this section and think about your interests in more detail.



To help you think more about your own interests and abilities, visit your school career or guidance counselor and talk about your ideas for the future. You can also talk to a parent, family member, teacher, or friend.

With help, you can develop a really good idea of who you are. Some things to think about:

**Interests:** What you enjoy doing like playing sports, reading books, working with your hands, or hanging out with your friends.

**Abilities:** The things you do well like writing, speaking, listening, singing, building things, or solving math problems.

**Values:** The things that are important to you like achievement, family, helping others, or independence.

**Goals:** Something you want to achieve.

# STEP 1: Discover Yourself Continued

## Have you ever heard of interest inventories?

They're short surveys that help you discover your interests and abilities. There are many free interest inventories on the Internet.

Here are two of the best:

[www.review.com/career](http://www.review.com/career)

[www.mapping-your-future.org](http://www.mapping-your-future.org)

“The beautiful thing about  
Learning is that no one can  
take it away from you.”

*B.B. King*

# STEP 2: Explore Your Options

## What's the best job in the world?

The best job in the world is the one that's right for you.

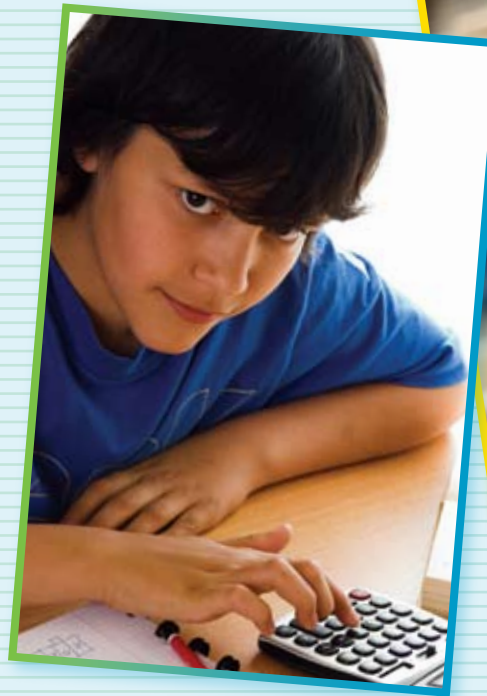
With hard work and planning, it is possible to earn a living doing exactly what you like.

Someone has to create video games, design roller coasters, become the president, or tap dance on Broadway.

## Why not you?

In the last section you learned about discovering your interests.

The next step in finding a career you'll love is matching your abilities, interests, and needs with different career pathways and jobs.

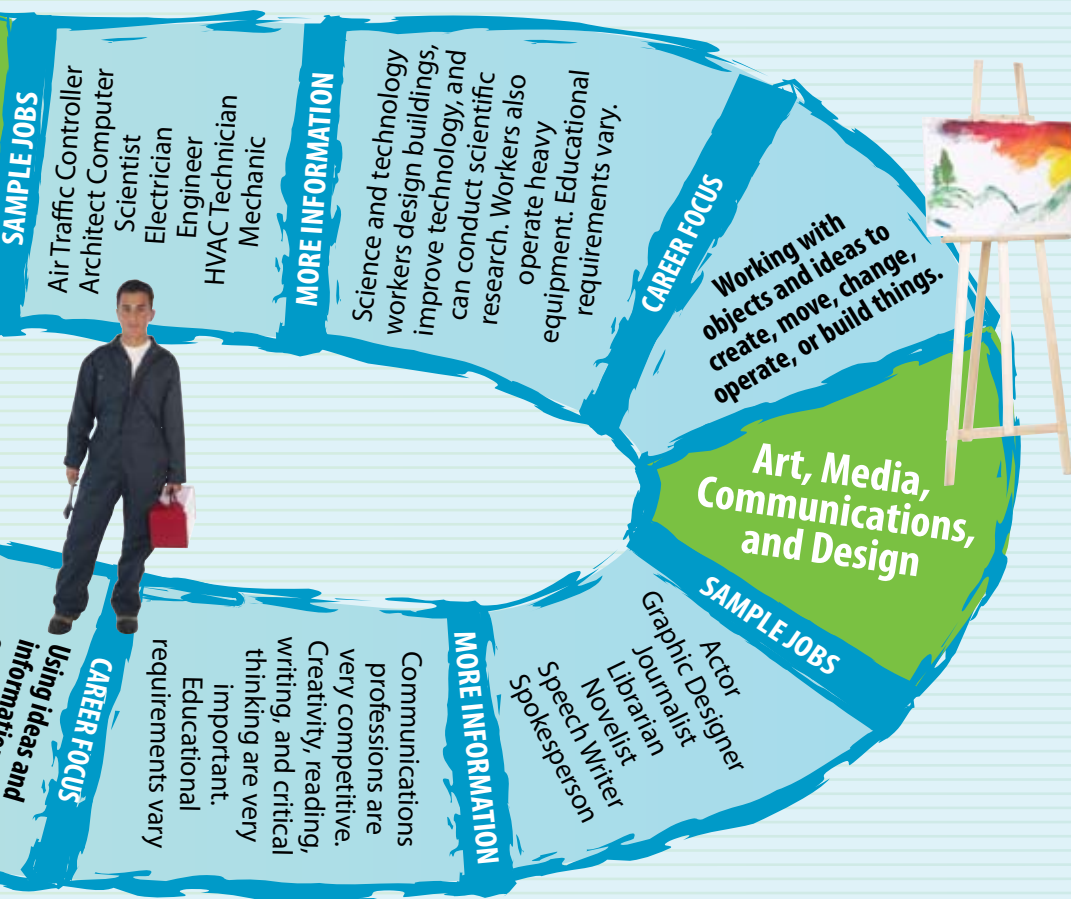


# STEP 2: Explore Your Options Continued

## Career Pathways

Career pathways are groups of jobs or professions that require similar interests, skills, and abilities. Jobs can fit into more than one career pathway. For example, Web designers mix business, technology, and graphic design. Look for career pathways that combine several of your interests and skills.





# Researching Careers

It's important to know what jobs and career pathways are like in the real world, and what opportunities will be available in the future. You don't want to learn to repair CD players when MP3s are the wave of the future.

There are several ways you can get this information. The U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics ([www.bls.gov](http://www.bls.gov)) offers information about career pathways in the *Career Guide to Industries*. The career guide tells you which skills, abilities, and interests are important for each career pathway, what jobs are available, and what workers typically earn.

The Bureau of Labor and Statistics also has information about specific jobs. Every two years the bureau publishes the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*. This book tells you what workers do on the job, how much training and education is needed for the job, and how many jobs will be available in the future.

If you don't have Internet access, many public libraries have copies of the *Career Guide to Industries* and the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* for you to use. You can also talk to your school guidance counselor. They can usually give you information about careers in your city or town.

## STEP 2: Explore Your Options Continued

### Activities

- List 10 to 15 activities and subjects that you really enjoy. Decide whether each activity involves people, things, ideas, or data (numbers and figures), and write down your answers. Based on your answers, what do you most like to work with: people, things, ideas, or data? Which career pathways match your interests?
- Choose five jobs that interest you and research them using the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* and the *Career Guide to Industries*. What kind of education do you need? Talk to a school counselor, parent, or friend about those jobs and how you can prepare.

“To love what you  
do and feel that  
it matters—  
how could anything be  
more fun?”

-Katharine Graham

# Opportunities for Success

Now that you've researched some careers that match your interests, you need to figure out what kind of education you'll need to get there.

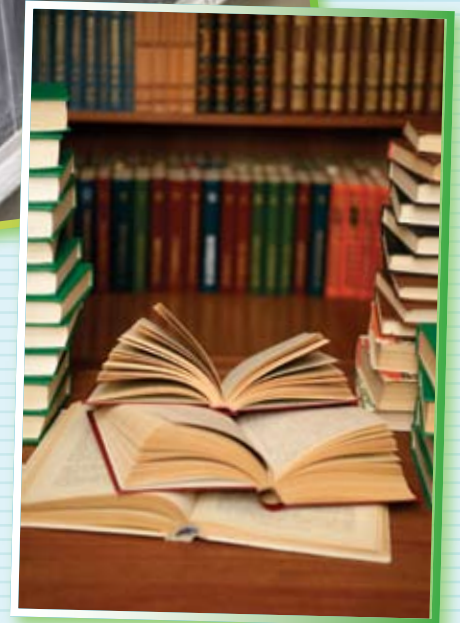
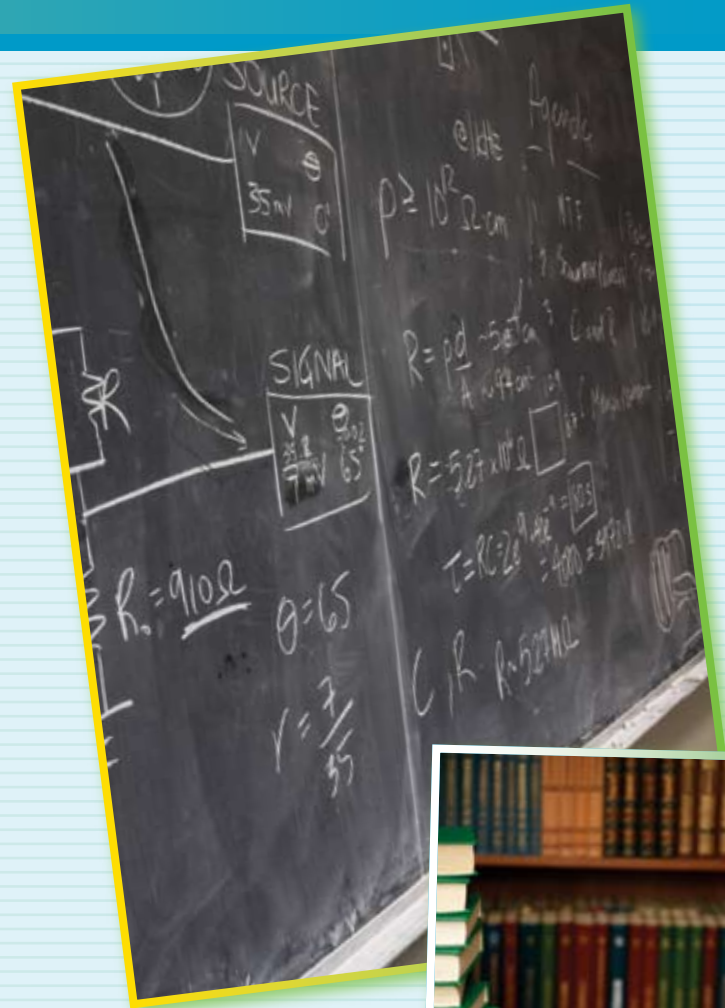
Some jobs require four-year college degrees or more, while others require two-year degrees, certificates, or apprenticeship training.

What kind of education and training will you need?

Colleges typically offer four kinds of degrees: two-year (or associate), undergraduate (or bachelor's), graduate (or master's), and doctoral or professional degrees.

- Associate degrees are earned by people who finish a two-year course of study, usually at a community college.
- Undergraduate degrees are usually earned by people who complete a four-year course of study.
- Graduate programs are open to people who have earned their bachelor's degree and want to continue their education for two or more years at a higher level.
- Doctoral and professional degrees (like law or medicine) take longer. Earning a doctorate (or Ph.D.) can take up to eight or more years.

Generally, the higher the degree, the more you have to learn and the more time it will take to finish the program.



# STEP 2: Explore Your Options Continued

Let's take a look at the types of training available at colleges and what it takes to complete a degree. Think about the career pathways and jobs that interest you and what kind of education you'll need.

1 -2 years of higher education	2 -3 years of higher education	2 -3 years of higher education	4 -6 years of higher education	6 -8 years of higher education	6 -8 years of higher education	8 -10 years of higher education
Some certificates prepare you for entry-level professional jobs, like legal assistant or secretary. Others add to the education you already have and increase your job skills, like emergency medical technicians.	Apprenticeship programs combine classroom study with on-the-job training. Apprentices (or trainees) learn skilled trades like plumbing, masonry, or carpentry.	Associate degrees often concentrate on the skills you need for a specific career like electronics or early childhood education. With some associate degrees you can transfer to a four-year college, complete just two more years of school and earn a bachelor's degree.	Bachelor's or four-year degrees require general and specific courses. Usually, students choose one or two subjects like art, literature, or science to study in-depth. These subjects are called majors or areas of concentration. Teachers, writers, engineers, and entry-level managers usually have these degrees.	Master's degree students have a bachelor's degree, and usually have some work experience, and the desire to continue studying a subject. These programs build on the information you learn in undergraduate classes and help you advance your career. People often earn Master of Business Administration (MBA) degrees to get ahead in the business world.	Professional programs require advanced study of specific careers like veterinary science, law, or social work. To work in these career fields you often have to pass a state or national exam. Professional degree programs prepare you for the exams and the work world. Professional degrees include MD for doctors, DDS for dentists, and JD for lawyers.	Doctoral degrees are the highest degrees offered by colleges. They are awarded in broad subjects like history, biology, and philosophy. These programs can take many years to complete. Doctoral candidates must research an original topic, write a lengthy research paper, and defend their research in front of a panel of experts.
Certificate	Apprenticeship	Associate Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree	Professional Degree	Doctoral Degree
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bookkeeper</li> <li>• Daycare worker</li> <li>• Medical or Dental Assistant</li> <li>• Truck Driver</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Electrician</li> <li>• Fire Fighter</li> <li>• Stone Mason</li> <li>• Welder</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administrative Assistant</li> <li>• Engineering Technician</li> <li>• Human Resource Specialist</li> <li>• Licensed Vocational Nurse (LVN)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Architect</li> <li>• Cartoonist</li> <li>• Computer Programmer</li> <li>• Stock Broker</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hospital Administrator</li> <li>• Marriage and Family Counselor</li> <li>• Physician Assistant (PA)</li> <li>• School Principal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chiropractor</li> <li>• Pharmacist</li> <li>• Priest or Minister</li> <li>• Social Worker</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• College Professor</li> <li>• Economist</li> <li>• Psychologist</li> <li>• School Superintendent</li> </ul>

# STEP 3: Getting There

While you're in middle and high school, it's important to take challenging classes like math, science, English, history, and foreign languages every year. These classes teach you how to read, write, think, reason, and compute. They also help you understand the world and develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills that will help you throughout your life. Taking challenging courses along with electives helps you make sure you're prepared for all types of colleges and careers.

Another step in getting to college is setting SMART goals. Goals give you a sense of direction — an idea of where you're headed. When you're focused on a SMART goal, you are less likely to get off-track.



## STEP 3: Getting There Continued

SMART goals challenge you to get things done on time. They also help you track your progress and record your achievements. Not-so-SMART goals can be unclear and unrealistic. To be sure your goals are SMART, stick to these basic rules:



S

**Specific:** For example, instead of saying “My goal is to be a doctor,” try “I will earn an M.D. degree by my 30th birthday.” Be specific about what you want to accomplish and when you plan to finish.

M

**Measurable:** With a SMART goal, you can set up milestones along the way to measure your progress. If your goal is simply to get a degree, how will you know when you’ve reached the goal? A degree could mean two, four, or even eight years of study. A SMART goal would be, “I want to earn a bachelor’s degree by age 24.”

A

**Ambitious and achievable:** Make sure your goals are reasonable. If you set a goal that is too high, you might get discouraged and give up. If your goal isn’t challenging enough, you could miss out on a sense of achievement when you complete it. Decide what stands between you and your goal and what information and help you will need. Allow plenty of time to get information and overcome any challenges.

R

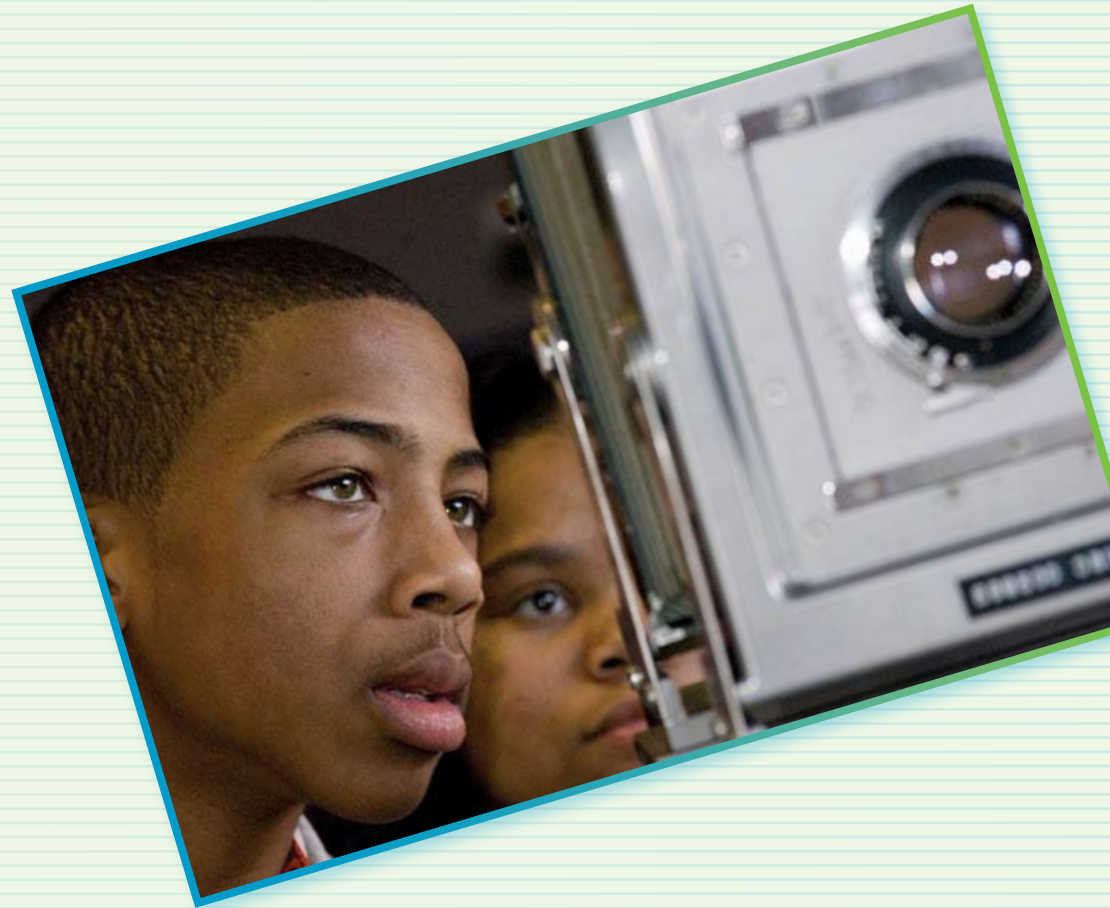
**Relevant:** SMART goals are those that are important to you. It is easy to let other people set goals for you based on what they want you to do. But goals set by others can be difficult to reach because your heart isn’t in it.

T

**Tailored:** Your interests change as you grow older. Goals that fit you now may not suit you later. Don’t be afraid to change your mind or make mistakes. You may want to adjust your goals because your life and interests change.

Sometimes, no matter how hard you try to set a SMART goal and stick with it, you might discover your goal is too easy, too hard, or just not right for you. If that happens, learn from the experience by asking yourself some important questions:

- Do I need to put in more effort?
- Do I need more information?
- Was my goal unrealistic?
- Did something beyond my control cause problems?



**Take time to evaluate your progress, adjust your goals, and celebrate your achievements!**

# STEP 4: Planning Ahead

## If your goals are the things you want

to accomplish, then your plans are the map that will get you there. Goals and plans work together to help you stay on track and reach your dreams.

You could try to plan completely on your own, but it's a lot easier to include family, friends, teachers, and counselors. They can often point out things you should include in your plans or challenges you can expect along the way. Use your family and school resources to help you make good plans.

“The direction in which  
education starts a man will  
determine his future life.”

*Plato*

# Planning for High School

You probably know that colleges will look at your high school classes, grades, and test scores, but you might not know that middle and junior high school classes are important too. To keep all of your options open for high school and beyond, you should start taking challenging classes now.

## Subjects You Should Take Every Year

*Math    Science    English    Social Studies*

These classes will give you the basic skills and information you'll need to be able to take challenging high school classes.

## Take These Electives When Possible

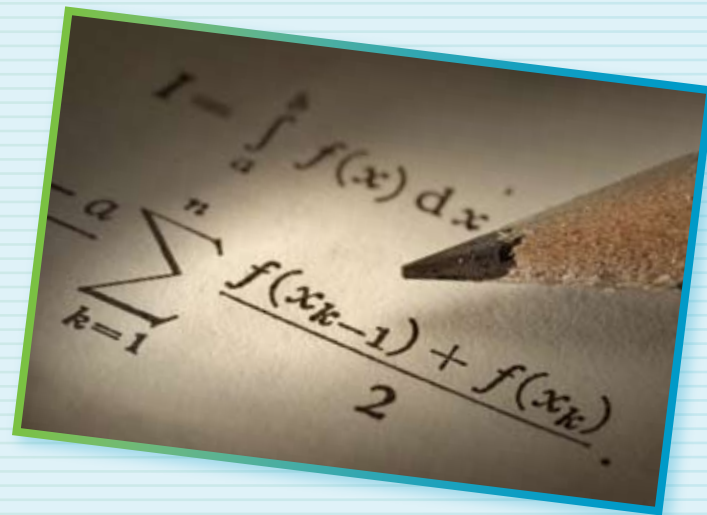
*Art    Music    World Languages*

## Challenge Yourself

*Take Honors Classes*

*Take Pre Algebra and Algebra I*

Studies show that students who take Algebra I before high school are more likely to go to college. But some middle and junior high schools don't offer algebra, so check with your teachers or school counselor for more information.



# School Course Plan

One way to plan for high school and college is to create a school course plan. On the next page is a sample plan for you to review. See how this student filled in classes for each semester (your school might have trimesters or quarters). Course planners help you keep track of the classes you take in middle school, junior high, and high school. To help you plan for college, fill out the blank course planner on pages 17 and 18.

“The final forming of a person’s character lies in their own hands.”

*Anne Frank*

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

School Counselor Name \_\_\_\_\_

- Questions to ask about your plans:
1. Am I planning to take courses that will challenge me (not just the easy stuff)?
  2. What is my goal for my 6th grade G.P.A.?
  3. What will I do to reach my goal?
  4. What school, community service, or volunteer activities will I include in my plan?

## Sample

### Classes Taken

Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
Math <i>6th Grade math</i>	Math <i>6th Grade math</i>	Math
English <i>Language Arts</i>	English <i>Language Arts</i>	English
Science <i>General Science</i>	Science <i>General Science</i>	Science
Social Studies <i>Geography</i>	Social Studies <i>Geography</i>	Social Studies
Academic Elective <i>Exploring Foreign languages</i>	Academic Elective <i>Exploring Foreign languages</i>	Academic Elective
P.E. or Industrial & Fine Arts <i>Gym</i>	P.E. or Industrial & Fine Arts <i>Gym</i>	P.E. or Industrial & Fine Arts
Elective <i>Choir</i>	Elective <i>Choir</i>	Elective

*I only have  
Two Terms!*

## Grade Level 6

### Classes Taken

Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
Math	Math	Math
English	English	English
Science	Science	Science
Social Studies	Social Studies	Social Studies
Academic Elective	Academic Elective	Academic Elective
P.E. or Industrial & Fine Arts	P.E. or Industrial & Fine Arts	P.E. or Industrial & Fine Arts
Elective	Elective	Elective

# STEP 4: Planning Ahead Continued

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

School Counselor Name \_\_\_\_\_

- Questions to ask about your plans:
1. Am I planning to take courses that will challenge me (not just the easy stuff)?
  2. What is my goal for my 7th or 8th grade G.P.A.?
  3. What will I do to reach my goal?
  4. What school, community service, or volunteer activities will I include in my plan?

## Grade Level 7

Classes Taken

Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
Math	Math	Math
English	English	English
Science	Science	Science
Social Studies	Social Studies	Social Studies
Academic Elective	Academic Elective	Academic Elective
P.E. or Industrial & Fine Arts	P.E. or Industrial & Fine Arts	P.E. or Industrial & Fine Arts
Elective	Elective	Elective

## Grade Level 8

Classes Taken

Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
Math	Math	Math
English	English	English
Science	Science	Science
Social Studies	Social Studies	Social Studies
Academic Elective	Academic Elective	Academic Elective
P.E. or Industrial & Fine Arts	P.E. or Industrial & Fine Arts	P.E. or Industrial & Fine Arts
Elective	Elective	Elective

# Staying on Course

The older you get the more responsibility you have for yourself and the choices you make. If you want to accomplish something, plan for it! If you need help, ask for it! No one is going to do it for you, but teachers, school officials, parents, guardians, and friends are there to help you achieve your goals.

One of the most important things you can do in planning and preparing for college is to get good grades in middle and high school. Good study habits are a big part of that planning and preparation. Here are some tips:



- Know your learning style. Take a learning-style quiz from a career specialist or counselor. It will help you plan study strategies.
- Decide what to study, how long to study, or how much to study before you get started. Set a goal and stick to your deadlines!
- If you're a motivated student, complete difficult tasks first. For procrastinators, start off with the easy or interesting part of the project. Reward yourself as you accomplish tasks.
- Have special places to study. Take into consideration lighting, temperature, and the location of a desk, pen, paper, etc.
- Study 30 to 50 minutes then take a 10 minute break. Stretch, relax, and have a snack. If you get tired or bored, move to a different location, subject, or task.
- Allow plenty of time for reading, outlining, and writing papers. Use less time for memorization, review, and self-testing.
- Use memory activities to review just before you go to sleep.
- Study with a friend. Quiz each other, compare notes, and predict test questions.
- Read all assignment and test instructions carefully.
- Speak up! If you need help, ask for it.

## STEP 4: Planning Ahead Continued

### Start the year practicing good study habits

and stick with them all year long. It's a lot easier to maintain good grades than to improve poor grades later.

Some of the most common studying challenges and tips to get over them are listed here. Maybe some of these tips will help you get more from your school work.

“Excellence is not  
a singular act,  
but a habit. You are what  
you repeatedly do.”

*Shaquille O'Neal*

# Don't Know Where to Start?

Your first challenge is to prioritize. With a big project, list all the things you have to do, then split the project into small, manageable pieces. Ask, "Which part is due first? Which part of the assignment is worth more points? Which task will take the most time to complete?" Decide which tasks are most important and what order you'll follow to get things done. Then, get started! The most important thing to remember is to start early and do a little bit each day. You'll be amazed at how much progress you make.



# Balancing School and Friends

This can be a challenge. Friendships are important, but so is school. A good way to balance school and friends is to study together. That way, you can hang out with your friends and accomplish your school goals, too. Good friends will support you and your academic future and goals. If your friends don't support your goals and ambitions, you may want to make new friends who will support you. You can help support your friends by getting them excited and invested in school too.

## STEP 4: Planning Ahead Continued

### Add Interest to Your Reading Assignments

To get through a long reading assignment, imagine yourself in the story. Get involved. Ask yourself, "What is important to remember about this section?" Take notes or underline key sections and discuss the material with other students in your class.

### Cramming Before a Test

Cramming before a test is a bad idea. Start studying well in advance, and keep studying as you go along in the school year. Begin with an hour or two each day, and then increase your study time as exams approach.

### Staying Up All Night to Study

It is important to have a rested mind before you take a test. You should relax and unwind mentally and physically before each test. Eat well, sleep well, and try to get some exercise. These will help you stay relaxed and do better on the test.



## Not Enough Time to Study

The trick to solving this problem is getting organized. Bring out all of your notes and textbooks. Identify the most important information and the things you don't understand. Focus your study time and energy on learning those things. If you need extra help, ask a teacher or tutor. If after-school activities are keeping you from your school work, keep a calendar with game days, meetings, assignments, and practices listed. Start assignments when you get them and use lunch hours and breaks to make extra progress.

## Trouble Remembering Things

Try connecting new information with your own examples and experiences. Use rhymes, poems, or mental pictures to help you remember important facts and information. Some people even make up songs to help them remember. If you still have problems remembering no matter how long or hard you study, talk to your school counselor. He or she can talk with you about your specific problems and recommend strategies to help.

“I am always  
doing that which I  
cannot do, in order  
that I may learn  
how to do it.”

— *Pablo Picasso*

# STEP 5: Make It Happen!

Now it's time to put the puzzle pieces together: your interests, your career exploration, your goals, and your plans. It's time to make it happen. In this section you'll find checklists to get you started. Remember, college planning is a family affair and a group effort. It starts with you, but if you need help at any time along the way, ask your family, teachers, counselors, and friends for help.



# Grade 6, 7, 8, Checklists

## 6th grade

- ☐ Set goals for middle school or junior high.
- ☐ Take the most challenging English, math, science, and social studies classes you can handle.
- ☐ Add classes in art, computers, wood shop, or world language if you can.
- ☐ Do assignments for extra credit.
- ☐ Focus on learning as much as you can and mastering key concepts.
- ☐ Ask questions and participate in class.
- ☐ Improve or continue good study habits.
- ☐ Get involved in school and community activities, like spelling bees, science fairs, and clubs.
- ☐ Think about activities and subjects that interest you.
- ☐ Take an interest inventory.
- ☐ Explore jobs and careers.
- ☐ Talk to family members, teachers, counselors, and friends about your dreams and plans.

## 7th grade

- ☐ Set goals for middle school or junior high, or revise old goals.
- ☐ Take the most challenging English, math, science, and social studies classes you can handle.
- ☐ If possible, take pre-algebra.
- ☐ Add classes in art, computers, wood shop, or world language if you can.
- ☐ Do assignments for extra credit.
- ☐ Focus on learning as much as you can and mastering key concepts.
- ☐ Ask questions and participate in class.
- ☐ Improve or continue good study habits.
- ☐ Get involved in school and community activities.
- ☐ Identify activities and subjects that interest you.
- ☐ If you haven't already, take an interest inventory.
- ☐ Explore jobs and careers.
- ☐ Keep talking to others about your dreams and plans.

## 8th grade

- ☐ Take the most challenging English, math, science, and social studies classes you can handle.
- ☐ Take pre-algebra or, if possible, algebra.
- ☐ Take classes in art, computers or world language, if you can.
- ☐ Do assignments for extra credit.
- ☐ Focus on learning as much as you can and mastering key concepts (Colleges will see your grades for high school classes).
- ☐ Ask questions and participate in class.
- ☐ Improve or continue good study habits.
- ☐ Get involved in school and community activities.
- ☐ Take an interest inventory (your interests may change over time, and your results may be different than before).
- ☐ Start thinking about goals for high school.
- ☐ If you are able to choose your high school, start visiting local schools to compare your options.
- ☐ Explore jobs and careers.
- ☐ Keep talking to others about your dreams and plans.



## Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs

This publication was made possible by the Washington State GEAR UP program.

GEAR UP is a national effort to encourage more young people to have high expectations, study hard, and go to college.

Washington State GEAR UP is a partnership of the Office of the Governor, the Higher Education Coordinating Board, the University of Washington, The College Success Foundation, and twelve school districts.

GEAR UP is funded by the U.S. Department of Education, in collaboration with state government, local communities, schools, colleges and universities, and the private sector.



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